

“Coolie: A Critical Appreciation of Themes in the Novel”

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Abstract: Indian literature has a huge heritage. There are numerous writers who wrote in their regional languages, in Hindi as well as now translate into English. Right from Rabindranath Tagore to the writers of post modern era i.e. Chetan Bhagat, Mahesh Dattan. In the nineteenth century Jayant Mahapatra, Kamala Das Mulk Raj Anand etc. are known Indian English writers. Mulk Raj Anand was a prominent Indian authors novels, short stories, and critical essays in English language. In India, he is well known for his realistic and sympathetic portrayal of the poor. He is considered as a founder of the English-language of Indian novel. He is one of the founding fathers of Indian English novel, the short-story writer and art critic. Mulk Raj Anand was among the first to use Punjabi and Hindustani idioms into English writings. His works 'Untouchable' (1935) and 'Coolie' (1936) gained him wide popularity, He was highly influenced by the world of Mahatma and his writings reflected the same. As a staunch Marxist, Anand never failed to draw a realistic picture of the poor in India. Anand was the "fiery voice" of those exploited and his analysis of the socio-political situation in his work reflects that spirited fight against social injustice. He was a recipient of the civilian honour of the Padma Bhushan. The aim of the present paper is a critical appreciation of the themes in his novel Coolie.

Key Words: Hunger, Starvation, Degradation, Misery, Sufferings, Exploitation, Encounter etc.

Introduction: Indian literature is well-known for its cultural and literary heritage. Epic, novel, dramas, poetries are the several genres of literature that is in all Indian regional languages as well as Hindi. Even now there are translated and direct English writing. Novels are always the matter of copy to dramas' theme. The novel 'Coolie' is written by Mulk Raj Anand in 1936, this made Anand's position as one of India's leading English authors. The novel is highly criticizing the British rule in India and Indian caste system.

The Plot of the Novel: The plot revolves around a Munoo, 14-year-old boy and his plight because of poverty and exploitation becomes more complicated because of the social and political structures. Anand tried to break the traditional way of life. A sort of eye opening part of life is reading novels in Indian English writing written by writers like Mulk Raj Anand is. Coolie is one of those novels which can be categorized in the best and interesting novels written in 1930. This paper comprehends and understands

his suffering and exploitation and also critically evaluates various themes in the novel. Anand was awarded the Silver Wedding Fund Scholarship of 300 pounds a year. His student life was disturbed by the coal miners' strike in Great Britain in 1926. The Government adopted the repressive measures to break the General Strike which resulted into the miner's strike.

Observation of the Violence by Anand: Anand observed the violence from a close quarter; international Socialism seemed to be the only solution to the problems of the world. Anand observed that the West with all its wealth and its allegiances to democracy was not free from a discreet despotic mind set. After the strike Anand bought a copy of The Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels and this had a great impact on him. He writes in, Apology for Heroism, that, "a whole new world was opened to me. All the threads of my past reading, which had got tied up in knots, seemed suddenly to straightened out, and I began to see not only the history of India but the whole history of human society in some sort of inter-connection" (1946:67-8).

The Vice of Suppressed: Anand became the voice of the oppressed. In India his work has been considered as propaganda. The Marxist-oriented, All India Progressive Writers Association accompanied as a decadent in 1949 as he found evil and cunning both in the poor and in the rich alike. Ideologically influenced by the left Anand was worried about the humanistic values'. He was believer of man's latent goodness. Socialism alone can provide the right climate for man's total development. According to Anand. Anand's humanism was based on Marxism. An individual's development is at the centre of Marxist thought. There is strong evidence of a close relationship between Marxism and Humanism in Anand's work. He wrote extensively on art and stated that art reflects life; but could not be taken as life itself. Anand himself did not belong to the marginalized sections of society provided he the necessary understanding that there was a distance between art and life. His political ideologies therefore have a definite place in the study of his novels. They arise from his concept of literature that reveals life in all its contradictions. To him, a work of art is first a social event and the duty of a novelist is to create but not to determine. His obligation to his fellow men lies in changing the world, making it a better place for each one of us.

Voice of the Exploited:

The voice of the suppressed and exploited is represented in Coolie. Anand depicts even the lower caste rejects and casts away the Coolies. When Munoo arrives in Bombay and takes refreshing drink, as a Coolie the proprietor tells him to sit on the floor and not on the chairs; he is treated like a leper "Oh! Look, Mummy! Our coolies are there cried little Circe. Her mother shushed her and asked her to behave. The sights of the creatures were challenges to the complacency of the ladies and gentlemen who had come for tea"(298).Experiences as a servant, a factory worker and a mill worker are Munoo's class

identity. As a factory and a mill worker he is of the working class; in each he has a productive role whether as a servant or a worker. His identity as a coolie is reduced to nothing. The two extremes of the wealthy imperialist bourgeoisie and the Coolie serve as objects of hope and fear in class system. Each class emulates and aspires to attain the status of next superior class it also harbors a fear of being de-classed. A product of ideology rather than economics as seen in Anand's introduction of Prabha's past as a Coolie who has risen to the ranks of a Seth is the anxiety in class relations is. Ideological undercurrent that moves in the entire class system is found in the novel. The imperialist bourgeoisie's fear of the 'native' being equal to him both economically and socially infuses in him a sense of insecurity for which he engages in abuse and exploitation in the name of racial superiority.

To Introduce the Marginalized Writing:

The life of an orphan Munoo despised by society, rejected by his relatives and oppressed by his masters is depicted in the novel. He avails chances of progress but his badluck produces hindrances in his way. The novel on an epic scale follows the tragic odyssey of Munoo as he finds himself in different class of society in different locations- the village, the towns, the big city, the hill station- each is not away from the ideology of exploitation and suppression. In Conversation s in Bloomsbury, Anand writes that, "...our epics have everything Love and War and death and jealousy and utensils and dice and things out of the toilet" (1993:92). Different ideologies such as Capitalism, Imperialism, Industrialism and Communalism to show their influence on the dispossessed and socially oppressed are introduced by him. All the negative aspects of the world are experienced by Munoo. From innocence to experience his journey is mediated through ideologies of suppression and empowerment.

Cruelty and Hypocrisy in Indian Feudal Life:

Anand exposes the "cruelty and hypocrisy of Indian feudal life..." (1946: 53). Munoo is full of life, high spirits and has a zest for life. Munoo's life in the village is not romanticized by Anand. Munoo the leader of the village boys was an expert in tree climbing. His life in the village is not a joyful one; the death of his parents haunted his life. A realistic portrayal of Munoo's life in the village which is not free from exploitation is portrayed by Anand. The novel points at the denial of basic necessities of life to a simple and landless peasant boy. We can see that Munoo is aware of his deprivation:

He had heard of how the landlord had seized his father's five acres of land because the interest on the mortgage

"Covering the unpaid rent had not been forthcoming when the rains had been scanty and the harvest bad. And he knew how his father had died a slow death of bitterness and disappointment and left his mother a penniless beggar, to support a young brother-in-law and a child in her arms... the sight of her

as she had laid dead on the ground with a horrible and yet sad, set expression on her face had sunk deep into him” (II).

British Rule and its Influence in India:

Anand's conviction that the British Empire not only has exploited India's natural resources, it also degraded and debased the character of the Indians who were serving it is illustrated by the episode. A group of native flatterers who looked up to the English sahibs, cowering before them and becoming easy prey for exploitation in the hands of their masters is created by it. The Indians like Nathoo Ram, Daya Ram had lost their sense of humanity, decency, and self-worth. They are devoid of in the service of the Raj and lose all feeling of affection with their fellow men leave alone their countrymen. The sahibs who visited at their homes. Nathoo Ram's reaction is evidence enough of the way the natives look up to the gore sahibs, after the disaster of the tea party he goes to drop Mr. England and returns with " ...tear-filled eyes" (59) Their status in society, their superiority over others defines it. On the contrary we have Dr. Prem Chand, an independent medical practitioner and not subservient to the English. The creation of sycophants is another result. An industrial-capitalist ideology because it was obvious that they were themselves solely concerned with profit was brought to India by Britishers. The direct result of British rule is the plight of Munoo and others of his kind. The question of freedom in a Capitalist society is raised by novel.

Contrasting the Rich and the Poor:

The rich merchants in starched Muslims against the dark Coolies in rags, the impressive bungalows of the English residents looks down on the congested slums of the Coolies is contrasted by Anand. The garish opulence exists alongside rampant filth, deprivation and poverty. He is overpowered by the confused medley of colours, shapes and sounds of Bombay's strange, hybrid and complex character as soon as Munoo emerges from the station. There are Europeans in immaculate suits, Parsis in frock suits and white trousers, Mohammedans in long tunics, Hindus in Muslim shirts and dhotis; there are Arabs, Persians and Chinese the road swarming with trams, cars and motorcycles. And ever present are the lepers, the beggars, and the Coolies in the dim damp alleys and slums, filled with the groans of the sick, the starving and the dying. The complexity and diversity of the city gradually disappears subsuming the social back ground, ethnic, racial and religious identity one might have and ultimately classifying one either rich or poor. The working conditions in the pickle factory of Daulatpur which is replaced by the Sir George White Cotton Mills are even more grueling and the foreman Jimmie Thomas is more abusive and tyrannical than Ganpat. The world of the poor is one of comradeship surrounded by foul smell, abuse, suffering, torture, exploitation, dust, heat and sweat. The British management offers no security of tenure. Jimmie Thomas rents out dilapidated huts at exorbitant rates. The Mill mechanic, a money-lender

and the Sikh merchant exploit the Coolies. The ill- paid, ill-housed, under-nourished, exploited, cheats and bullied Mill worker is beaten body and mind as we find in the case of Hari. Munoo is saved from such a fate by his youthful vitality. In the Mill we have the 'Red Flag Union', a workers union led by the Communist leader Sauda who, ironically, exhorts the poverty stricken workers to go on a strike when all they can think about is where their next meal will come from. The preparation for the proposed strike leads to a bloody Hindu- Muslim communal riot; instigated by the employers to divert the attention of the workers. In the riot some of the workers lose their jobs, their livelihoods and even their lives.

The Memories of Village:

The memories of his village and this section contain one of Anand's best Nature descriptions. As a painter of Nature in all its moods Munoo has a remarkable flair for evoking the smells and colours of the Nature. The steep hills overgrown with rich green foliage, the streams and the waterfalls, the clouds rolling swiftly across the sky, the crisp cool air, all stand in sharp contrast to the heat, the dirt and humidity of Bombay. He responds mentally and emotionally to the beauty of the world around him as well as observes the world of the rich upper classes of society and wishes to belong to this class. Kindness and affection of his Mistress fires his adolescent passion till he is unable to bear his feelings and crumples at her feet in an orgy of tears and kisses. Sexual urges- half expressed and half understood- had tormented Munoo from the very beginning, and like much of his life these feelings were never truly comprehended or realized, as in an adolescent growing up without any guidance. Munoo's feelings from being diverted entirely to the physicality of his sexual awareness rather he describes the effects of his sexual awareness on the emotional aspects of his character are prevented by Anand. When Munoo was unable to understand why he finds himself looking at Sheila's body outlined in her wet garments feels ashamed. Later the warmth of Parbati's body as he nestles against her arouses confused feelings in him. The same confused feeling prevails when he returns to them ill after a night out with Ratan at the local brothel. Hari's wife, who understands the boy's feelings, takes him in her arms and whispers, "*We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering*" (247).

Conclusion: The novel draws its strength from Anand's social commitment. Coolie is ideologically loaded for it British imperialism transformed the traditional economy of India into an industrial economy. It considered India as a vast market for its own industrial goods. The Imperialist system is identified with an oppressive capitalist system in which the bourgeois rule the roost. The class system based on capital and industrial productivity replaces Indian aristocracy and the feudal classes are bought over to side with the Empire and the old feudal caste system. India was forced by colonialism in to a new economic and social structure with the intention of maximizing profit unmindful of the repercussions it would have on the traditional socio-economic structure of the colony. Coolie is undoubtedly one of the most novels of Anand. It has been translated into more than twenty prominent languages.

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